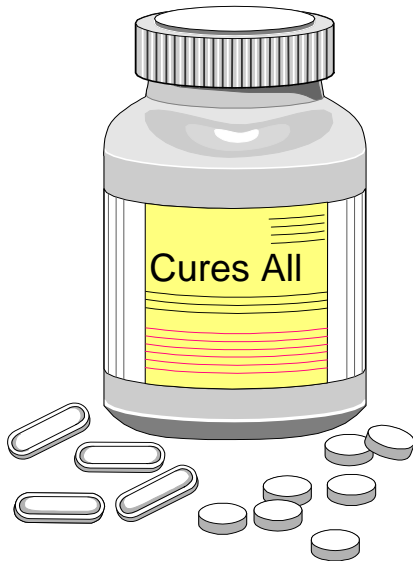


# Facts for Consumers



Health & Fitness

## FRAUDULENT HEALTH CLAIMS: DON'T BE FOOLED



Federal Trade Commission  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
Office of Consumer & Business Education  
1-877-FTC-HELP [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)

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### FRAUDULENT HEALTH CLAIMS: DON'T BE FOOLED

Consumers waste billions of dollars on unproven, fraudulently marketed, and sometimes useless health care products and treatments. In addition, those with serious medical problems may be wasting valuable time before seeking proper treatment. Worse yet, some of the products they're buying may cause serious harm.



### HOW TO SPOT FALSE CLAIMS

Remember the first rule of thumb for evaluating any health claim: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Also, be on the lookout for the typical phrases and marketing techniques fraudulent promoters use to deceive consumers.

- ◆ The product is advertised as a quick and effective cure-all for a wide range of ailments.
- ◆ The promoters use words like *scientific breakthrough*, *miraculous cure*, *exclusive product*, *secret ingredient* or *ancient remedy*.
- ◆ The text is written in "medicalese" – impressive-sounding terminology to disguise a lack of good science.
- ◆ The promoter claims the government, the medical profession or research scientists have conspired to suppress the product.
- ◆ The advertisement includes undocumented case histories claiming amazing results.

### Poison Ivy Is Natural, Too!

Just because a plant or herb is "natural" or unprocessed does not necessarily mean it's safe. Unlike prescription or over-the-counter medicines, herbs and other food supplements do not have to undergo review for safety or effectiveness before they are marketed. Some "natural" products, like herbs, may have powerful pharmacological effects that could present risks for people who take other medications or who have specific medical conditions.

It's not hard to be taken in by a promoter's promises, especially when successful treatments have been elusive. But the fact is that when it come to claims for health-related products, a healthy dose of skepticism may turn out to be the most promising prescription.

- ◆ The product is advertised as available from only one source, and payment is required in advance.
- ◆ The promoter promises a no-risk "money-back guarantee." Be aware that many fly-by-night operators are not around to respond to your request for a refund.

Be wary of health care clinics that require patients to travel – and stay – far from home for treatment. While many clinics offer effective treatments, some prescribe untested, unapproved, ineffective, and possibly dangerous “cures.” Moreover, physicians who work in such clinics may be unlicensed or lack appropriate credentials. Contact state or local health authorities where the clinic is located before you arrange an appointment.



## WHY HEALTH FRAUD SCHEMES WORK

Health fraud is a business that sells false hope. It preys on people who are victims of diseases that have no medical cures, such as HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, and certain forms of cancer. It also thrives on the wishful thinking of those who want short-cuts to weight loss or improvements to personal appearance. It makes enormous profits because it promises quick cures and easy solutions to better health or personal attractiveness.



## SOME MEDICAL PROBLEMS THAT ATTRACT HEALTH FRAUD SCHEMES

### CANCER

A diagnosis of cancer can bring feelings of fear and hopelessness. Many people may be tempted to turn to unproven remedies or clinics that promise a cure. Although some

cancer patients have been helped by participating in legitimate clinical trials of experimental therapies, many others have wasted time and money on fraudulently marketed, ineffective and even dangerous treatments.

When you are evaluating cancer-cure claims, keep in mind that no single device, remedy or treatment is capable of treating all types of cancer. Cancer is a name given to a wide range of diseases that require different forms of treatment best determined by a medical doctor.

For more information about cancer, contact the American Cancer Society office listed in your yellow pages. To order free publications on cancer research and treatment, call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-422-6237.

### HIV AND AIDS

People diagnosed with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, also may feel pressured to try untested “experimental” drugs or treatments. Although there are legitimate treatments that can extend life and improve the quality of life for AIDS patients, there is, so far, no cure for AIDS. Trying unproven products or treatments can be dangerous, and may delay proper medical care. It also can be expensive and usually, is not covered by insurance.

Don't be pressured into making an immediate decision about trying an untested product or treatment. Ask for time to get more information from a knowledgeable physician

or health care professional. Legitimate health care providers will not object to your seeking additional information. The U.S. Government has established a toll-free HIV-AIDS Treatment Information Service, 1-800-HIV-0440. This information help line is staffed by health information specialists who are fluent in English and Spanish.

### ARTHRITIS

If you are among the estimated 37 million Americans who suffer from one of the many forms of arthritis, be aware that this disease invites a flood of fraudulent products and services. This is because medical science has not yet found a cure for arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation advises that symptoms should be monitored by a doctor because the condition can worsen if it is not properly treated.

Consumers spend an estimated two billion dollars a year on unproven arthritis remedies. Thousands of dietary and natural “cures” are sold for arthritis — mussel extract, vitamin pills, desiccated liver pills, shark cartilage, and honey and vinegar mixtures. Many supplements marketed as arthritis remedies are not backed by adequate science to determine whether or not they offer any relief. For a free brochure about unproven remedies, call the Arthritis Foundation, toll-free, 1-800-283-7800 (9:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday-Friday), or write: Arthritis Foundation, P.O. Box 19000, Atlanta, Georgia, 30326.



## PRECAUTIONS FOR TAKING DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

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Thousands of dietary supplements are on the market. Many contain vitamins and minerals to supplement the amounts of these nutrients that people get from the food they eat. There also are many products on the market that contain other substances like high-potency free amino acids, botanicals, enzymes, herbs, animal extracts, and bioflavonoids.

The Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) review of the safety and efficacy of these products is significantly less than for drugs and other products it regulates. Be cautious about using any supplement that claims to treat, prevent or cure a serious disease. The FDA has approved only a few claims for labeling, based on a review of the scientific evidence (for example, claims about folic acid and a decreased risk of neural tube defect-affected pregnancies). The FDA allows other disease claims on supplement labels only if they are based on authoritative statements from scientific organizations like the National Academy of Sciences.

Some dietary supplements have documented benefits; the advantages of others are unproven and claims about those products may be false or misleading. For example, claims that you can eat all you want and lose weight effortlessly are not true. To lose weight, you must lower your calorie intake or increase your calorie use through exercise. Most experts recommend doing both.

Similarly, no body building product can "tone you up" effortlessly or build muscle mass without exercise. Claims to the contrary are false. Other questionable claims may involve products or treatments advertised as effective in shrinking tumors, curing insomnia, reversing hair loss, relieving stress, curing impotency, preventing memory loss, improving eyesight, and slowing the aging process.

In addition to lacking documented effectiveness, some dietary supplements may be harmful under some conditions. For example, many herbal products and other "natural" supplements have real and powerful pharmacological effects that could cause adverse reactions in some consumers, or cause dangerous interactions with other medicines. It doesn't necessarily follow that supplements marketed as "natural" are safe and without side effects. The FDA monitors reports of adverse reactions to dietary supplements to identify emerging safety issues.

According to the FDA, the following substances in dietary supplements are among those that can raise serious safety issues: chaparral, comfrey, lobelia, german-der, willow bark, ephedra (ma huang), L-tryptophan, germanium, magnolia-stephania preparations and dieter's teas. In addition, some vitamins and minerals can cause problems for some people when taken in excessive doses. Finally, a label of "natural" is no guarantee of a product's safety or effectiveness.

If you use dietary supplements, always read product labels to determine the percentage daily value for various nutrients in the product. Also, it's a good idea to seek advice from a health professional before taking dietary supplements, particularly for children, adolescents, older people or those with chronic illnesses, and women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REPORT A PROBLEM

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To determine the value of a health care product or treatment, consult a pharmacist, doctor, or other health professional. To report a company you believe may be making false advertising claims, contact:

- ◆ The FTC by phone, toll-free, at 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: 202-326-2502; by mail to Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; or online at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) — click on Complaint Form.
- ◆ Your state Attorney General's office, your state department of health, or local consumer protection agency. These offices are listed in your local telephone directory.
- ◆ To report a company for falsely labeling its products, call your local FDA office.
- ◆ To report an adverse reaction or illness that you think is related to the use of a supplement, call a doctor or other healthcare provider immediately. You also may report your reaction or illness

to FDA MedWatch by calling 1-800-FDA-1088 or on the FDA web site at **[www.fda.gov/medwatch/report/hcp.htm](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/report/hcp.htm)**. Patients' names are confidential.

- ◆ For information about a particular hospital, clinic, or treatment center, contact state or local health authorities where the facility is located. If it is in a foreign country, contact that government's health authority to see that the facility is properly licensed and equipped to handle the procedures involved. For information about facilities in Mexico, contact the Secretary of Health (Secretaria De Salud) in the Mexican state where the facility is located.